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THE
BELFAST MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

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COMMUNICATIONS, ORIGINAL AND SELECTED.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

GENTLEMEN,
HAVING read in your number for August, Remarks on the proceedings of the Synod of Ulster, signed "An Observer," permit me, through your publication, to make some strictures on these remarks.

Although "Observer" pretends to be wholly uninterested in the proceedings of the Synod "relating to Dr. Dickson, any farther than the cause of truth and virtue was concerned," it is evident to any person acquainted with the controversy, that he is not uninterested, but that he is a zealous advocate of Dr. Black, and the party who have acted with him against Dr. Dickson.

This party being in the minority at the last meeting on many important points, "Observer" comes forward to assist the "fallen great," by condemning the conduct of the majority; and at the same time grossly misrepresents the proceedings of Mr. Porter, who was the leader in this business, and abuses Dr. Dickson very freely. It might have been expected that this party, which had been so long the dominant faction, would betray a little chagrin upon their recent disappointment and defeat: their vanity was mortified when their folly was unmasked. Doctor Black wished to make the public believe that Dr. Dickson had not any real grievances to complain of against the Synod, and that there was not one word of truth in that

part of Dr. Dickson's Narrative, for he asserted that the writer of the Narrative was "always in error in matters of fact." It is probable that with some readers his assertion in the "two Speeches" obtained a temporary credit; however this was only of short duration, as it is now ascertained by incontrovertible testimony, that there are a considerable number of misstatements and misrepresentations in Dr. Black's publication, although the professed object of his book was to detect and expose misstatements in the Narrative.

A majority of the last meeting of Synod, in opposition to Dr. Black, have now acknowledged that Dr. Dickson had just cause of complaint against former meetings, and have expressed their regret at the treatment he received. If this had been done sooner, it would probably have prevented him from publishing a Narrative of his grievances, which has been so injurious to the reputation of the Synod; for although Dr. Black wished to make it appear that misstatements only in the Narrative were hateful to the reputation of the Synod, many undeniable facts are there stated which have cast a lasting stigma upon the Synod of Ulster. Dr. Dickson has not asserted any thing as an *undeniable fact*, which has been proved to be untrue. Many discussions took place during his confinement of which there was no record, but he had to depend upon the imperfect recollection of those who were present; and from the

distance of time it was not surprising that he should make some misstatements; but it must be admitted that he has been cautious, and expresses doubts respecting the accuracy of what he has related, and it is necessary to observe, that if he had been fully acquainted with every circumstance which had occurred during his exile, and had minutely detailed the whole truth and nothing but the truth, the character of the Synod, as a body, would have suffered as much as it has done: this I shall show as I proceed. On the other hand, it is undeniable that Dr. Black has not expressed any doubts about his misstatements, but has related them in a tone of confidence, as if he were certain they were true. He has misrepresented matters that took place where he was an eye-witness; matters which he could not be misinformed about by others, nor could he have misapprehended his information like Dr. Dickson. These errors were partly acknowledged by Dr. Black at our last meeting, and he pleaded that he had forgotten what had happened, for which he expressed his sorrow. I must admit that the distance of time is also an apology for Dr. Black; but he should not have made these assertions in such a bold, confident manner; some things which shall be noticed, he passed by without any apology, and he could not have pleaded want of recollection.

"Observer," in the following paragraph, finds fault with the last Synod for expressing regret at the conduct of a former meeting

"For the Synod of 1813 to have passed a sentence of improper conduct on another Synod held several years before, consisting of very different members, whose views and motives cannot now be ascertained, seems to be the height of absurdity: even to express regret seems rather

going too far, inasmuch as the conduct which we now condemn might then have been very wise and proper." This sophistry was used in the Synod-house by one of Doctor Black's friends. If such conduct as this were pursued by Synods or any other deliberative assembly, errors would be made perpetual. If a Synod, or a Parliament, or any body of men, ecclesiastical or civil, cannot condemn, alter, or amend what had been enacted a few years back, then there is no occasion for annual meetings. If their proceedings are irrevocable one meeting might be sufficient for many years. The assertion of "Observer" amounts to this, that all the meetings of Synod which made any decision against Dr. Dickson were very wise and proper, even although they did not show any reason to support their decisions, and that it would be improper to review them, lest they might be condemned: but on the other side, he finds no difficulty in reviewing and condemning any decision in favour of Dr. Dickson. He can very inconsistently pronounce a sentence of "inexcusable deliberate folly," upon the last meeting, but is greatly provoked that a majority of that meeting should exercise this privilege which he assumes to himself. I would ask "Observer" why the views and motives of the meeting of 1805 could not be fully ascertained. Those gentlemen who had taken the most active part in the business to which he alludes, the dismissal of Dr. Dickson's memorial, attended the last meeting; therefore if any good reason could be given for such a proceeding they might have explained their "views and motives." The gentleman who seconded the motion for the dismissal in 1805, voted with the majority that the Synod should record this expression of regret. Many others who

voted in this way had perceived their error in 1805. This acknowledgment of doing wrong and being sorry for it, was magnanimous. Will any impartial *uninterested* man say as "Observer" has done, that the Synod of 1813 "went too far" in expressing regret that the Synod of 1805 had dismissed, without an answer, a memorial presented to them by Doctor Dickson? Was it unreasonable for him to ask the Synod what was meant by the phrase "implicated, &c.?" and being what the Synod called a "misguided and unworthy member," was it too much for the Synod to give an answer to this plain question? To none shall we deny right or justice is promised in the great charter, and this should be religiously observed by Synods, and preachers of that pure morality of doing unto others as we would wish they should do unto us. When Dr. Dickson petitioned the Synod eight years ago, for a redress of his grievances, his reverend fathers and brethren were deaf to his entreaties; insult was added to the injury he had sustained, therefore, the last Synod could not do less than express regret at such conduct. "Observer" says that the first resolution of last Synod respecting the phrase "implicated, &c. is no very great triumph for independence," and in another place he says that "it amounts almost to nothing." Here I must again differ with "Observer," although this resolution was not so strongly expressed as it might have been, it amounts to a great deal: the object of the mover was to make the censure light upon the Synod of 1799, but at the same time to show that instead of Dr. Dickson being a vile slanderer for complaining of their minute of that year, the Synod should be charged with inaccuracy, which was liable to an unfavourable construction respecting him; this was

adverting to the first of Dr. Black's charges, or his "first point," therefore it now appears that instead of Dr. Dickson being the vile "assassin of the Synod's character," as Dr. Black had represented him, the Synod was to blame for inaccuracy. Such was the opinion of the last meeting, or the majority of it; does not this amount to a great deal? Is this nothing, as "Observer" represented? Dr. Black and the party that usually act with him, saw that it was a heavy blow, and they tried to avert it: first, by complaining that the motion was out of order; when that failed, they all supported an amendment that the Synod should not "proceed farther in the business respecting Dr. Dickson." This amendment was proposed by a gentleman who had not attended the meeting of 1812, he condemned the conduct of that meeting for taking up the Narrative, and alleged that they had acted improperly against Dr. Dickson in the preceding year. Strange it must appear, but it is true, that Dr. Black voted for this amendment, and that the business should be quashed. He was willing that Dr. Dickson should be forgiven all his offences, rather than a vote of censure should pass against those who framed this famous, or rather infamous minute of "implicated, &c." To accuse the learned Doctor, who very probably held the pen, of inaccuracy could not be endured; it was thought more *expedient*, even in the first stage of the business, not to proceed farther against Dr. Dickson, who had been represented by Dr. Black, as unfit to be a member of the Synod. It had also been proclaimed in the newspapers, and in the "Substance of two Speeches," that Dr. Dickson was a man unfit for the ministerial office, that he was to be suspended *ab officio*, but as a special favour

had obtained a respite of one year, until he should repent and acknowledge that he had misconceived the phrase "implicated, &c.," that he was satisfied that all the charges of being "misguided and unworthy, meant no more than to be suspected of being misguided, &c.;" but although Dr. Dickson had not in this stage of the business been called upon for an apology, these gentlemen thought it more advisable that he should pass unnoticed than that Mr. Porter should proceed with his resolutions, and take a review of their own conduct. They perceived a feeling in favour of Dr. Dickson, that he had been more sinned against than sinning, therefore, they were anxious to get quit of the business as quietly as possible, after blustering so much at a former meeting about expulsion.

(*To be continued*)

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

IF the following suppositious case were submitted to the Attorney General, for his opinion, what would his opinion be?

TO HIS MAJESTY'S ATTORNEY-GENERAL.

Sir,

A number of Roman Catholics in this Kingdom are desirous of forming societies on the principle of the Orange and Purple societies, but as they at the same time, do not wish to violate the law, they solicit your opinion on the following queries.

1st. Whether Roman Catholics have the same right to form societies exclusively Catholic, that the Orangemen have to form societies exclusively Protestant; their object being the same, viz. "to support our good King and Constitution, and the Protestant succession to the throne, in

his Majesty's illustrious house?"*

2d. Whether, in the event of their forming these societies, they may not wear orange ribbons as emblems, or ribbons of any other colour they may chuse to adopt? Whether they may parade on certain days with insignia, banners, music, &c.?

3d. Whether one of their own body, who is not a magistrate, may administer the necessary oaths?

4th. Whether, in the event of an attempt being made to disperse them,† they may not resist by force; or whether an action would not lie against any person so attempting to disperse them?‡

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

IN addition to my former Queries respecting a phenomenon in Astronomy, I would beg leave to ask, is not the Northern Constellation of *Cassiopeia* a very conspicuous one, containing several contiguous stars of the first and second magnitudes? And yet it is described in one of Cicero's verses thus:

Obscurâ specie stellarum Cassiopeia.

De Natura Deorum, 2d Book.

I would also take the liberty to suggest, that as the majority of your readers are such as may not have ready access to a celestial globe or planisphere, it might contribute to general entertainment, if some of your correspondents attempted a de-

* This is neither more nor less than what Catholics as well as Protestants are already sworn to; so it cannot be amiss to swear it over again.

† This can hardly be expected, as these societies will be bottomed on Loyalty.

‡ According to Judge Daly's opinion, processions are perfectly innocent in Orangemen; of course they must be so in the Catholics.